

# *U.S. Firms Sign Direct Telephone Traffic Deal*

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Havana, March 15 (RHC-Xinhua) -- Cuban and U.S. telecom firms have signed an agreement to establish direct international voice traffic, basically in incoming and outgoing calls, the Cuban official daily Granma reported on Monday.

Cuba's state telecommunications company Etecsa signed the interconnection accord with New York-based Verizon Partner Solutions, a division of Verizon Communications Inc.

The deal paves the way for direct telephone communication between the two countries, but Etecsa said in a statement the service won't be available until "the period of implementation and technical testing both operators are undertaking is complete." Etecsa did not provide a date.

One of the four big U.S. telecom firms, along with AT&T, Sprint and T-Mobile, in September 2015 Verizon became the first U.S.-based wireless company to offer travelers roaming service in Cuba, according to the company's website.

This latest deal is the third of its kind signed between Cuba and the United States since Havana and Washington announced their decision in December 2014 to restore diplomatic ties after half a century of animosity.

In February 2015, Etecsa signed a similar accord with IDT Domestic Telecom, and in November it signed a roaming agreement with Sprint.

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